

MARITIME MOBILITY AND PERIPHERAL MANHATTAN

Investigating the Spatial-Temporal Quality of Urban Waterfront

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Thesis "Manhattan Cruise Terminal Development"

I INTRODUCTION

The lecture series portrayed a landscape of coexisting systems of knowledge, where our specific architectural exploration is situated, although often unconsciously. Personally speaking, I think that this notion of situatedness is crucial, since it reminds us that that we are always using a certain set of ways of observing and interpreting objects, ways which are historically constructed. Constantly reflecting our own position to the entire landscape of knowledge systems and its tradition, we get to know the significance and the limitations of what we do. The dialogue between different schools of thoughts, at the same time, can always stimulate new insights into the architectural discipline.

The lectures helped me to better frame the research topic and the strategies that I adopt. In this research process, the excursion to New York is crucial, but how to read such a complex metropolitan? Once we decide on our approaches of observation, whether to focus on the pattern of residents' behavior, the experience of moving inside the urban space, the border conditions between neighbors, the typology of housing or the built artifact, we position ourselves in a certain place. The approach that I have chosen informed me what architectural intervention I should propose. By further referencing relevant literatures and lectures (especially of Klaske's and Berker's), I refined my research question and tactics.

The Complex Projects studio which I am doing addresses complex social-spatial issues in current urban space by developing a narrative which is followed by an architectural intervention. In such premise, we are encouraged to look into the city through different lenses. My research focuses on the Manhattan waterfront and its relationship with maritime mobility. The Question is, what role maritime mobility could play in the post-industrial transformation of the Manhattan waterfront?

The experience of maritime travelling defined the way that Manhattan was experienced and understood, while the golden age of ocean-liners also witnessed a busy and diverse maritime urban space. (Fig. 1) Rise of container ships and air travelling after WWII initiated the transformation of the waterfront, which seriously weakened its significance in the structure of the city, changing Manhattan to a centric city from a peripheral city. (Fig. 2, Fig. 3) I view global tourism which is democratized in our post-modern time as a new opportunity for developing the area, as a substitute/complement to the current Hudson River Park proposal of turning water edge into green public space. The spatial-temporal pattern of the cruise terminal and its economic impact on the city, as well as water-land transit are investigated.

I believe that the spatial-temporal quality of urban waterfront is crucial in the contemporary context. Motion from the Atlantic to the city periphery is a compressed experience as it combines different scales of mobility, and establishes a legible image of the space. The occupation of the cruise terminal, in respond, follows a seasonal pattern, providing an instantaneous effect comparable with urban events and spectacles. An identity of the city based on mobility and displacement (instead of placeness) could possibility be constructed. It also questions the current mobility system of Manhattan (based on subway) which resulted in the manipulation of the social time in an artificial urban interior, by shifting focus to the mobility of urban exterior (the water edge), and its distinct spatial-temporal quality.

II RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The research methods adopted in this study is defined as context-lead (according to Lucas, 2016), qualitative (according to Groat and Wang, 2013) and inductive. The perspective of it is both *phenomenological* and *spatial-political*, where the tension between these two systems create a unique insight into the topic. Diverse tactics are applied, including surveying, filming and mapping.

The reason why such approach is chosen is multiple. Firstly, the temporal quality of space is often neglected in many approaches, where urban space is considered to be merely defined by built artifacts. The experience and mobility of a maritime waterfront, however, cannot be understood with any positivism thoughts. In this case, phenomenology allows a new perspective into subjective perception rather than objective existence, which does not exclude the dimension of time in reading a space. As Lynch claimed, "The city is... a thing perceived in the course of long spans of time. City design is therefore a temporal art."¹ Similarly, Pallasma stated, "We desire experiences that mark and

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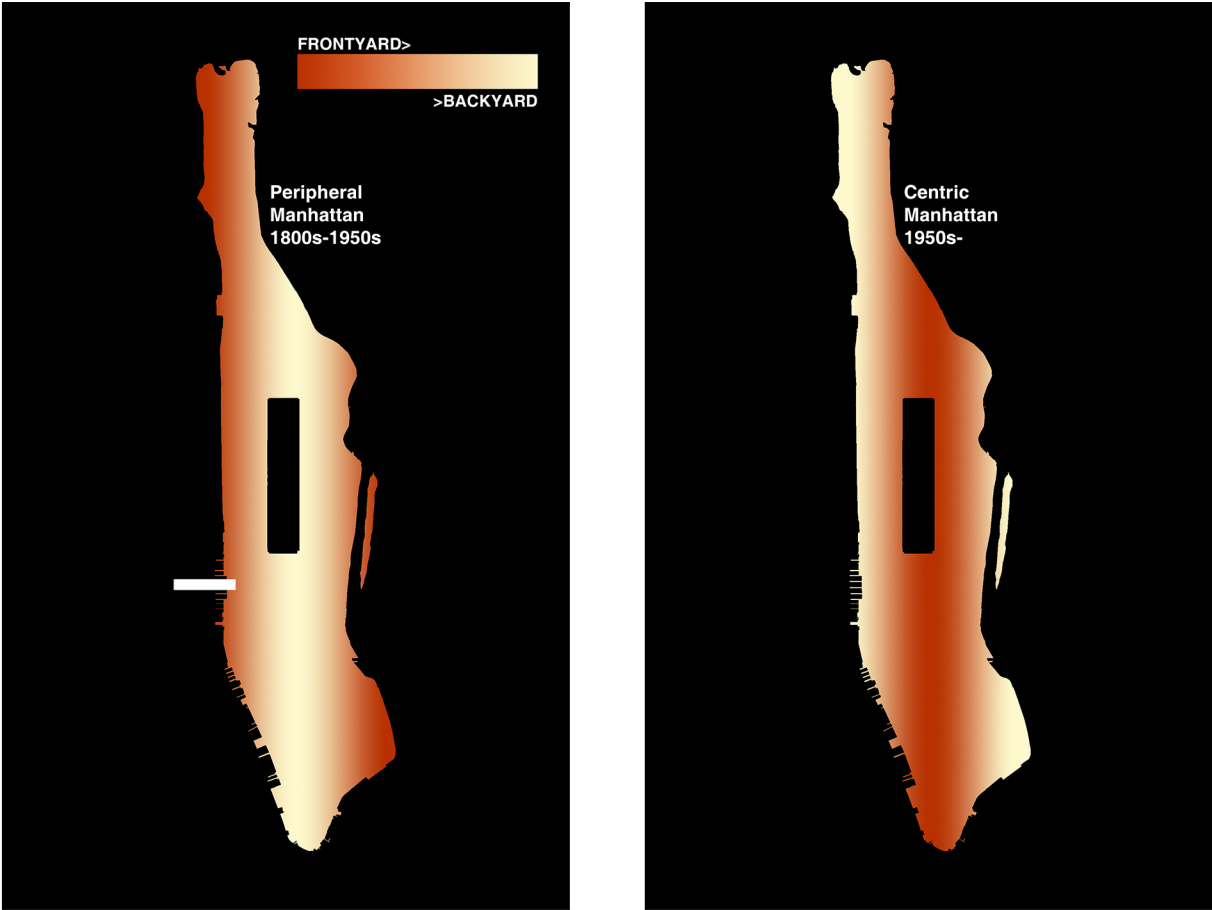


Figure 1 West Street, Manhattan, 1900. Figure 2,3 Diagrams: Peripheral and Centric Manhaattan.



measure the course of time and convince us of its availability.”² The lecture given by Klaske is as inspiring, as it shows how the essence of space can be observed in an imaginative and poetic way, which reveals the ability of phenomenological reading.

However, the mythical concept of *dwelling* of Heidegger is refused in this study. Instead, a narrative claiming the identity of Manhattan formed with *mobility is built*. When travelers and immigrants from the other side of the sea got their first sight of lower Manhattan lying on the Atlantic mist, the meaningful connection between the voyage and the place is established. Manhattan’s mobility is of the scale of the Atlantic Ocean, which fails any attempt to construct a singular myth that bound it with its static nature.

Secondly, the spatial-political perspective leads to the shift of focus from central Manhattan to its periphery. In this study, the term *urban interior* is used to refer to the densified geographical center of Manhattan, which is seen as the opposition of its *urban exterior* (the waterfront). The urban interior of Manhattan, featured with homogenous grids and the underground rail system detached from natural phenomenon, is at the same time a socially produced landscape of scientific spatial-temporal organization. This autonomous landscape is, however, set limit by the geographical boundary of the waterfront. By referring to Harvey and Lefebvre’s works, it is possible to understand the tension between physical geography and human geography in Manhattan, thus the tension between the waterfront and the city core.

From both perspectives of the study, the research topic is of increasing significance globally. As the decline of maritime mobility and the rise of global tourism intensifies, the perceptual quality of water-bound cities is challenged. New modes of mobility and technology leads to commodifying of social time, which brings about political concerns in big cities. The study has thus a potential to contribute to a broader context.

III RESEARCH-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Phenomenological thinking in architecture goes back to its philosophical root in the early 20th century. Husserl use the word phenomenology to refer to a move “back to things themselves”.³ In this sense, it suggests a fresh perspective into built environment as a life-world where we bodily present. The concept was further developed by Heidegger, who shift the concern from *things* to conditions of humans’ *being*. His elaboration of *dwelling* seen *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1954) has a direct influence on architects, which sees building and dwelling as a series of sense-making practices in certain place.⁴ For example, Norberg-Schulz’s *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (1979) was inspired by Heidegger’s thoughts, where the author used the phrase Genius Loci to describe the essence of a place that can be grasped by designers, which is also related to regionalism practices.⁵ Besides, Merleau-Ponty derived his interest in perceptual issues from Husserl, seen in his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). His sense of bodily engagement and environmental embodiment is highly relevant to architectural practice, thus gained high significance in the discipline. Phenomenology keeps relevant through the cultural-political shift to postmodernism. Some theorists see its activist potential in shaping cultures and communities in contemporary world, seen in, for example, Alberto Pérez-Gómez’s work, *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (2006). In this sense, it touches upon broader social-political issues.

Phenomenological thinking is present in the practice of various architects, for example, Juhani Pallasmaa, who addresses more on the environmental psychologist aspect of phenomenology in his public building designs; and Steven Holl, whose design concepts of *intertwining*, *anchoring* and *parallax* show influences from Merleau-Ponty. Besides, Kevin Lynch’s approaches toward urban design falls loosely into this category. The perspective of the chair Methods and Analysis in TU Delft is as relevant, as it addresses more on the cultural/activist potential of phenomenological-architectural practice.

The political dimension of geography/space is evident in the works of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, who both adopted certain Marxist standpoint. In his work *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre laid the foundation of viewing space as a social product, with his conceptual triad of

spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces, which reveals the liberating potential lies within spatial agencies. Based on Lefebvre's contribution, Harvey developed his understanding of social-temporal organization in the logic of capital accumulation, which he believes has constructed a unique perception of time and space. His idea was built upon a few precedents, including Foucault's notion of spatial imprisonment, de Certeau's concept of rationalization of everyday life, Bourdieu's concept of Kabyle, the mythical structure of collective rhythm and Bachelard's attention on the space of imagination.⁶ It is noteworthy that Bachelard's work *The Poetics of Space* (1958) is also frequently cited in phenomenological architectural study. The common interest in culturally constructed spatial-temporal perception opens a dialogue between these two schools of thoughts. Some other works, including Guy Debord's contributions, has directly initiated certain architectural trends. In addition, the lecture given by Berker on praxeology also promotes the awareness of landscape as constructed visual ideology, and rights to the space for marginalized groups.

From 1960s, Situationist architect Constant, avant-garde groups as Archigram and Superstudio, experimental architects as Lebbeus Woods all showed concerns towards broader social-political issues. Despite the apparent differences in their approaches, there seems to be certain common agendas lies within their practice, including preference for instantaneous and mutable forms, game and playful attitude, megastructure, self-organization and new concepts toward objects/technology. However, most of the proposals are not realized, due to their uncooperative nature with the current production system of architecture. Currently, the approach of minor architectural intervention, often in community scales, is preferred by some contemporary architects, which often aims at social integration and empowerment.

The foundation of this study is laid upon literatures of historical record on waterfront Manhattan, while both of the perspectives mentioned above helped me develop my specific insight into on the significance of maritime mobility. The temporal quality of waterfront shapes the perceptual structure of Manhattan, and at the same time constructs the patterns of everyday life. Thus, instead of representing the physical space of the city, I paid attention to alternative materials, including itineraries, schedules, guidebooks and photography. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

IV POSITIONING

The methodological position of this study is set at certain cross-point of these two perspectives. It does not seek for any ontological understanding of the city in the Heidegger-Norberg-Schulz sense, but rather focus on the its perceptual quality in relation to the maritime mobility, which follows the Merleau-Ponty tradition. Lynch's mapping technique is accepted, but also challenged, under the condition that maritime traveling produces an unusual experience that composes larger geographical scale, in which the city has to be understood. Here, the viewpoint is both emic and etic. This is further combined with Harvey's observation of the social-political importance of spatial-temporal organization, in relation to the instantaneous conditions of waterfront that featured the presence and absence of cruise ships. The study kept certain academic consistency by reflecting on the contributions/literatures mentioned, while also directly informs the following design process.

1/ Exile

"A world-battered, hard boiled Englishman confessed to me that his first vision of the towers of Manhattan, sun-illuminated above the low-lying Atlantic mist, moved him to tears for some reason that he could not understand."⁷ The exotic imagination of Manhattan as a transatlantic metropolitan was formed in late 19th and early 20th when countless travelers and immigrants accessed the new continent by taking those magnificent ocean-liners. The transatlantic journey from Europe took usually seven days, where passengers were trapped on the floating city, in the middle of the sea, until the continent of North America came into their sights. Through the Ambrose channel they entered the Upper New York Bay, when the passengers from the lower decks were allowed to go up, and to salute to the Liberty Statue, as well as the magnificent picture of the lower Manhattan tip, before they went

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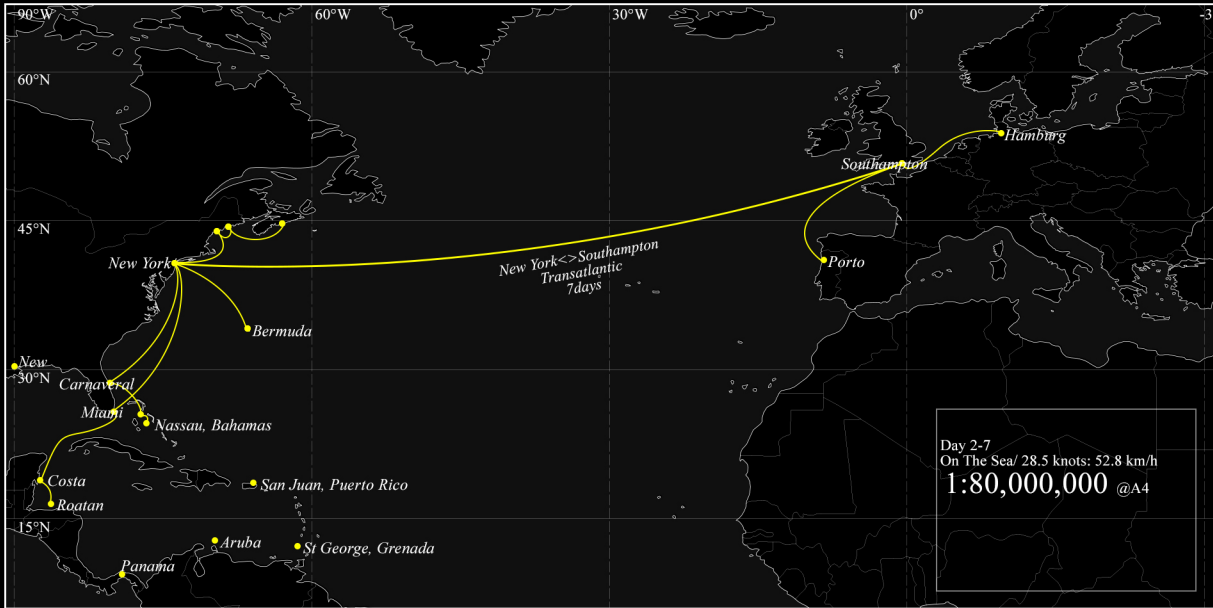
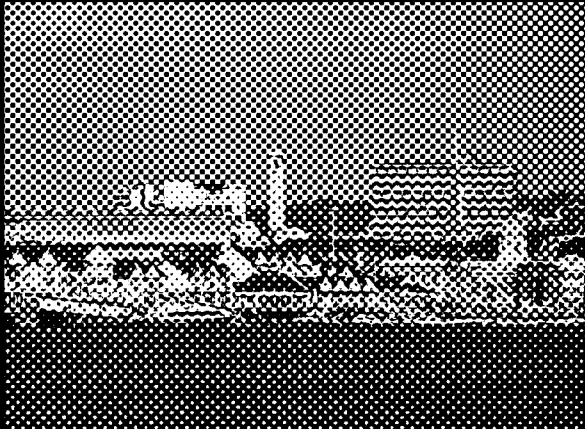
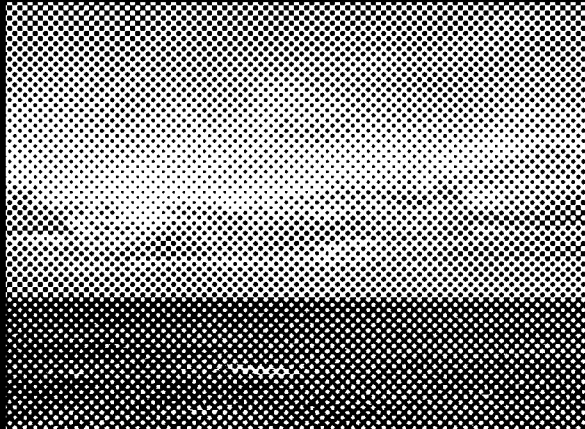


Fig. 4 Mapping of Transatlantic Travel.
 Fig. 5 Storyboard.

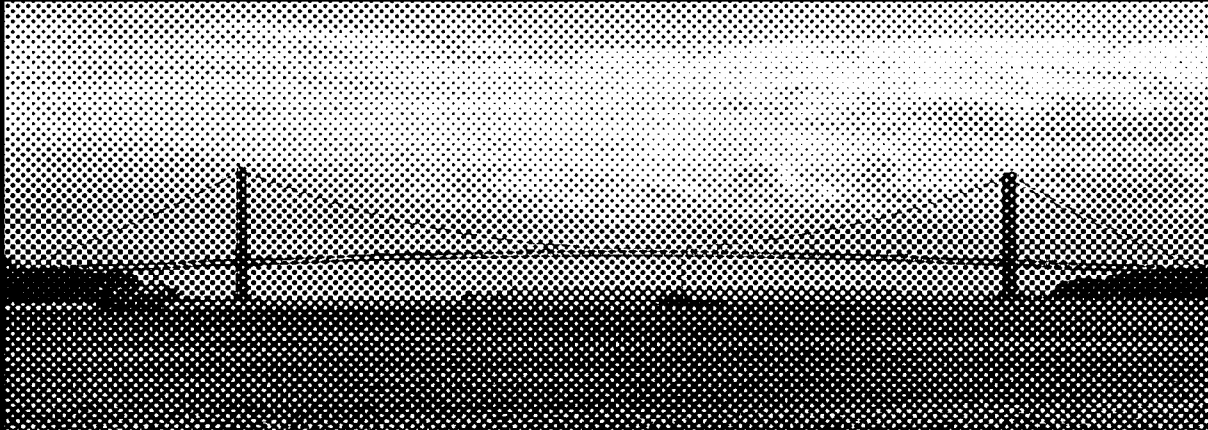
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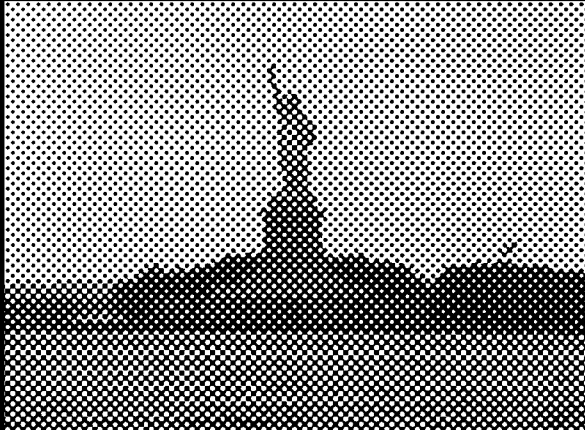
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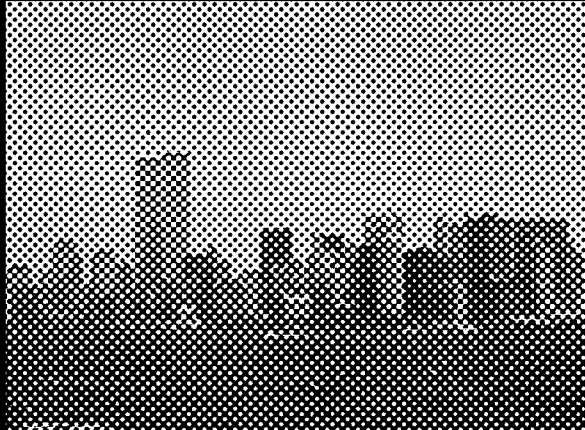
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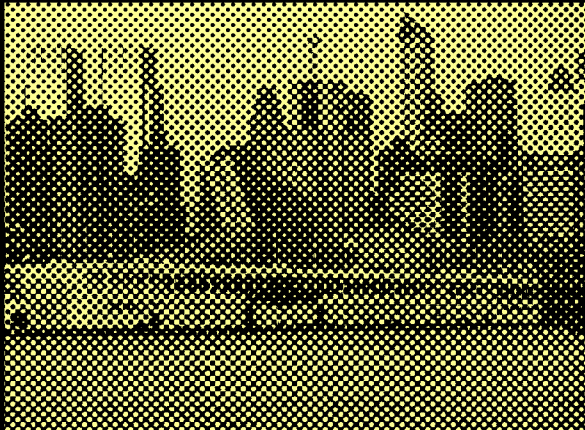
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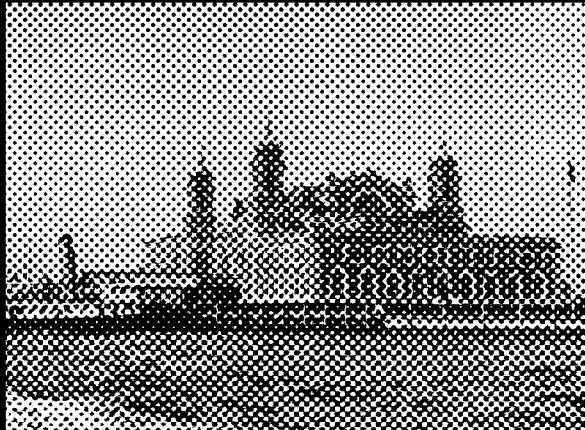
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against the Hudson River, and docked at one of the super piers right next to the heart of New York, the Midtown. Travelers disembarked from here, while immigrants were transferred back to the immigration station on the Ellis Island, where they went through the formalities.

This process is then mapped in combined formats. The physical maps are made in three scales, which shows a continuous experience across different geographical notions that is eventually anchored to the Manhattan periphery, which is made possible by the maritime mobility available at the time. (Fig. 4) Attached is another map made in film storyboard format, which recorded the key moments in chronological order, as well as a short film. (Fig. 5) In the story board, scenarios from across the ocean and Manhattan city are juxtaposed as a complete product. Manhattan is not perceived as an autonomous entity, but rather an object that can only be understood in relation to a larger geographical scale. While the works of Heidegger and some other phenomenological literatures often present certain nostalgic obsession with premodern/static ways of perceiving the environment, I would argue that these perceptions were already challenged since the Age of Discovery with the advancement in mobility. In his work *The Poetic of Relations* (1997), Glissant described the experience of exile of black people in slave trade, through which he tried to establish a transformative mode of history which is not passively associated with any imposed/fixed forms. Here, the *spatial practice* equipped with mobility certainly contributes to a unique *representational space*, where the transatlantic *imagination* of people continuously reshapes the image of Manhattan.

2/ Event

“A lot of people were watching, from apartment-house rooftops in Brooklyn, from parking lots and bicycle paths along the Hudson River in Manhattan, from helicopters that swooped low as television camera operators zoomed in on the 1,132-foot-long ship.”⁸ The first arrival of Queens Mary 2 in New York on 23 April, 2004 was recorded as a city-wide celebration, so is the first arrival of Queens Mary in New York on 1 June, 1936. The eventual and instantaneous nature of cruise ships brings a unique quality to the waterfront. Comparing the schedule and schemes of the cruise terminal to the subway system, two distinct types of spatial-temporal organization could be observed. (Fig. 6, Fig. 7) Cruise traveling is highly dependent on climate thus shows a seasonal pattern, while their destinations are globally distributed outside of the city. The space of cruise terminal is situated on the periphery of the city, with large-span structure that accommodate large waves of people and can be transferred to other uses in low seasons. By contrast, subway runs in an autonomous space that is not bothered by natural causes, and follows strictly on the daily routine. The space of subway station is often situated in the densest part of the city, with stable daily passenger flow.

The itinerary and schedule are good resources in representing the spatial-temporal organizations of infrastructures, as they represent how people are intentionally organized. Combined with this are the interviews and recordings of passenger’s behavior. By referring to Berker’s idea of “landscape as a visual ideology”, it’s clear how mobility infrastructures are used to construct a productive landscape of everyday accumulation (featured with rush hour passenger flow on weekdays), and at the same time, another consumptive landscape of leisure and spectacle (featured with vacation information on guidebooks and advertisements).

3/ Vision

“(In the early 20th century) It was a gateway village between the metropolis and the sea. For many, this tidewater frontier was the only New York they knew. It has its own hotels, bars, and brothels, as well as at least one floating church. The density and chaos of the New York waterfront was an archetype of maritime urban space.”⁹ With the research done, it is possible to predict the potential of revitalizing waterfront in its post-modern, post-industrial transformation, with maritime mobility reintroduced by redeveloping the old infrastructure of Manhattan Cruise Terminal. (Fig. 8) The perceptual, social-political possibilities of the mobility infrastructure allow it to play a more significant and meaningful role in the future of Manhattan.

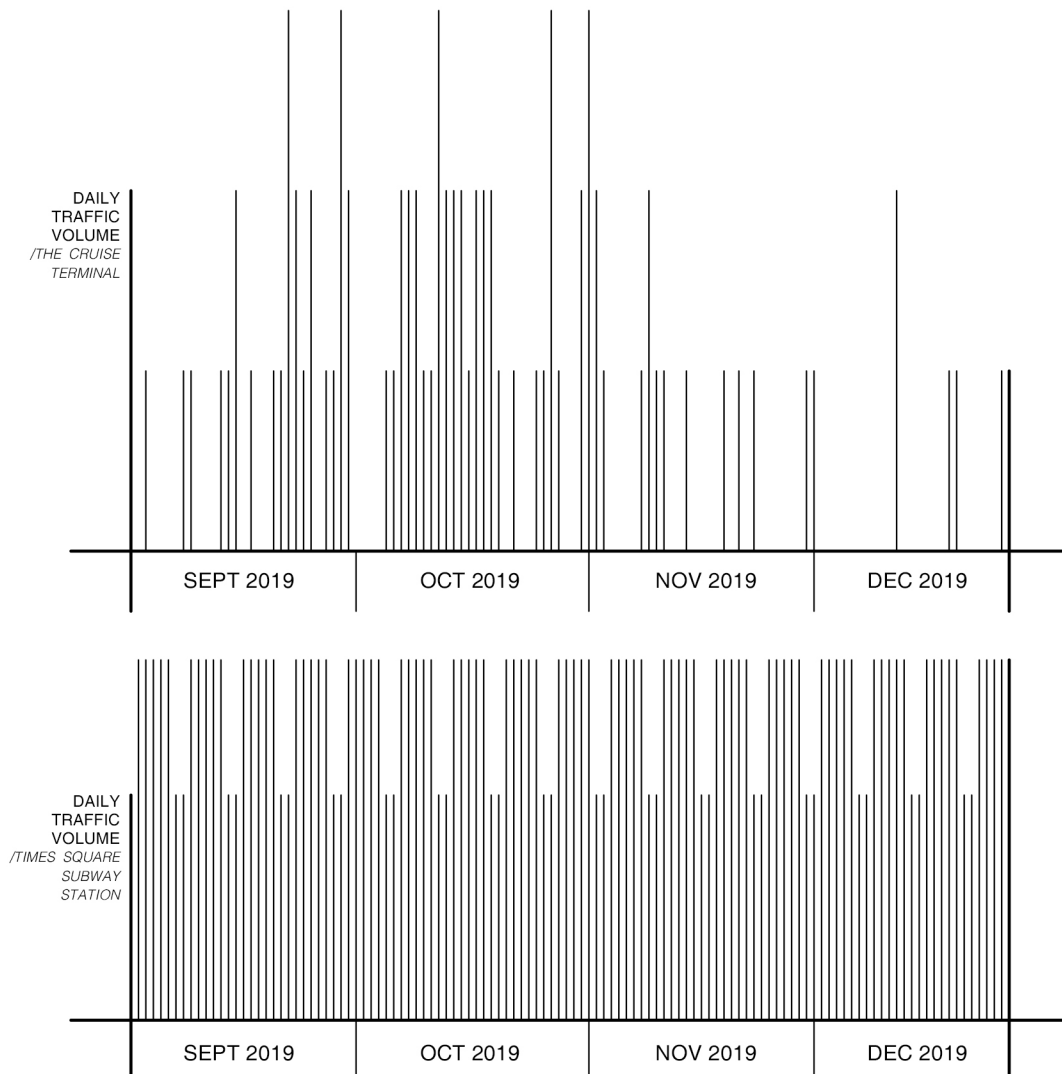
I see spatial-temporal quality of cities/architectures as an important factor in constructing the perceptual characters and cultural identity of a place, as well as in influencing the everyday practice of people in a deeper social-political way. The imagination and speculation derived from the perception

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*Mobility Systems
 of Manhattan*

Systems	Subway	Maritime
Cultural Landscape	Productive	Consumptive
Schedule	Everyday	Event
Structure	Centric	Peripheral
Itinerary	Interior Local Scale	Exterior Global Scale

Figure 6 Table: Landscapes of Spatial-Temporal Organization. Figure 7 Diagrams: Schedules.



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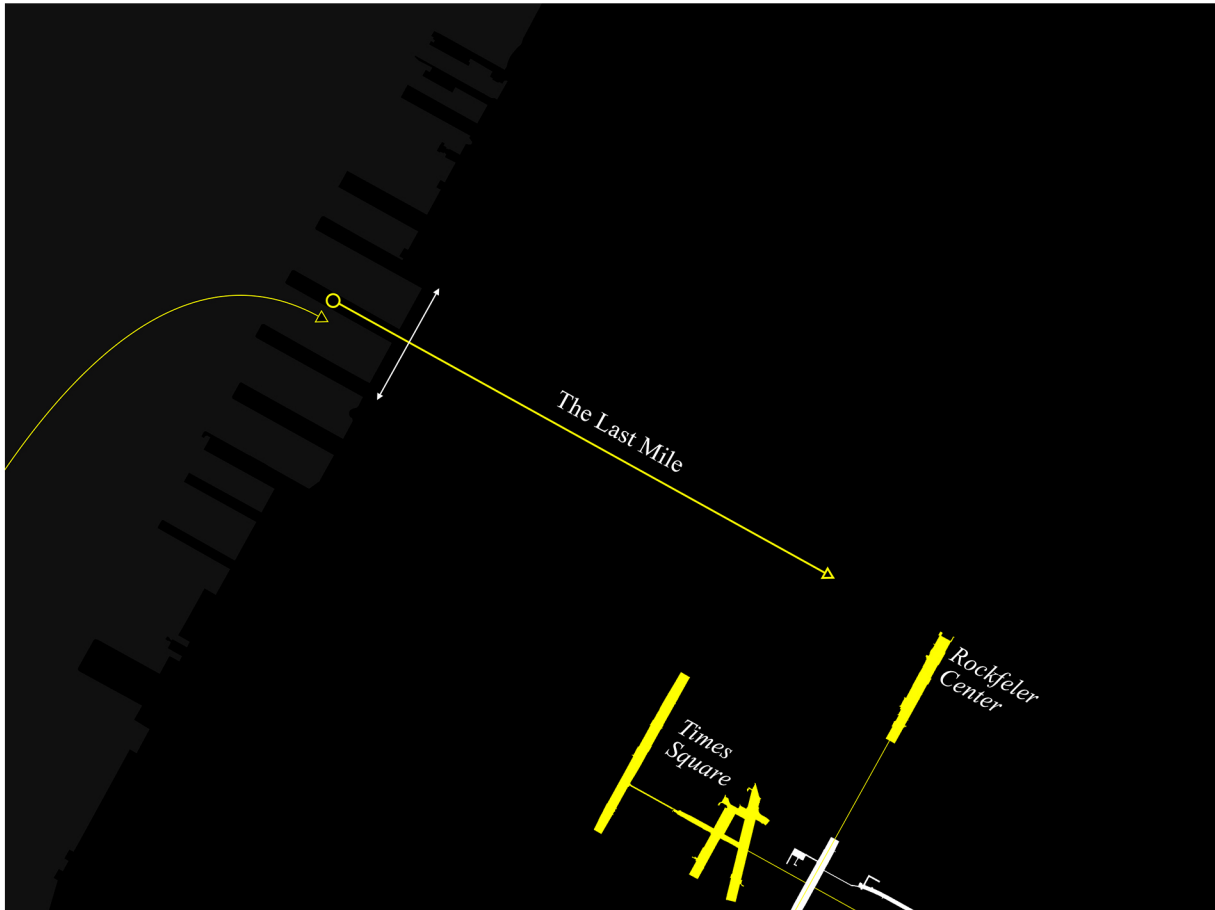
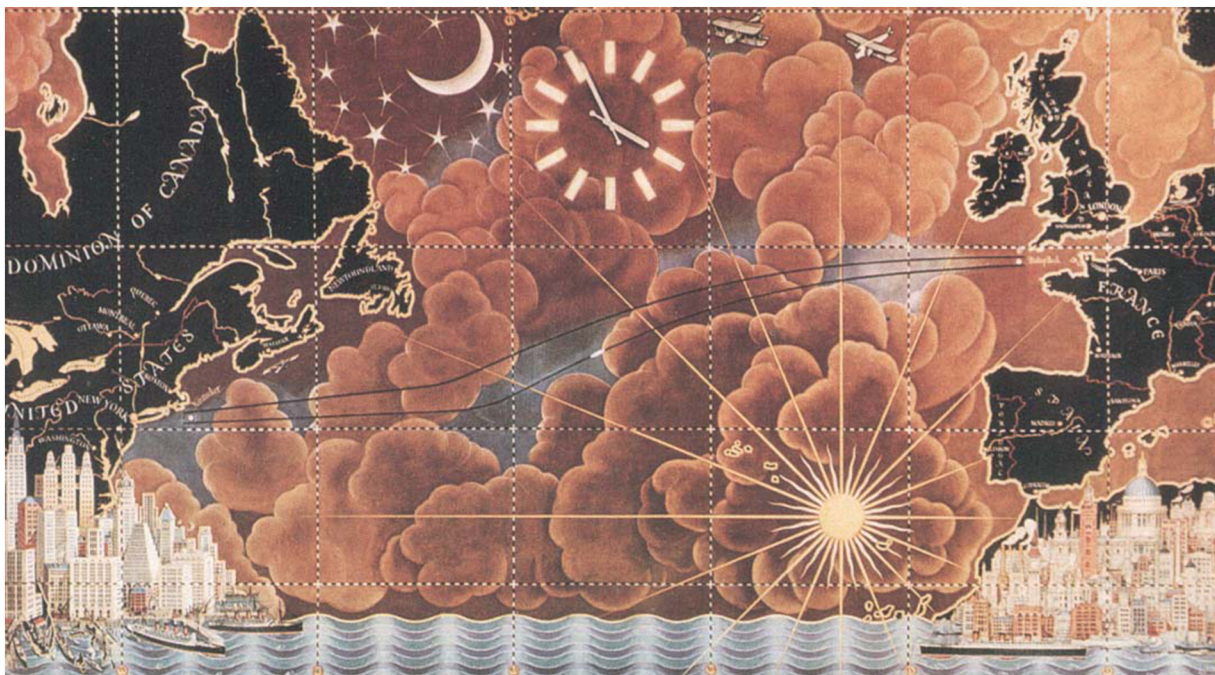


Figure 8 Water-Land Transit

Figure 9 The Artwork in the Dining Room of RMS Queen Mary



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of the city forms a unique *representational space*, which in turn reshapes the physical environment. (Fig. 9) Back to the research question, the study convinced me that maritime mobility has the fundamental role to play in the waterfront transformation of Manhattan, because of the spatial-temporal quality it created. And I believe that the heuristic position I developed would also help me better position my design intervention in the physical environment.

END NOTES

- 1 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997), 1.
- 2 Juhani Pallasmaa, "Inhabiting Time," *Architectural Design* 86, no. 1 (2016): 57.
- 3 Edmund Husserl, "Logische Untersuchungen," in *Husserliana*, vol. XVIII (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1975), 6.
- 4 Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 141-160.
- 5 Richard Hyde, "Regionalism in Architecture as Cultural Identity," *Queensland Review* 5, no. 1 (1998): 61-68.
- 6 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 211-225.
- 7 David Gilbert and Claire Hancock, "New York City and the Transatlantic Imagination," *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 1 (2006): 77-107.
- 8 James Barron, "A Queen Arrives, and Even in Jaded New York, Jaws Drop," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2004.
- 9 Kevin Bone, *The New York Waterfront: Evolution and Building Culture of the Port and Harbor* (New York: Monacelli, 2004), ?.

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